My Last Flight

I was awaken [illegible] that morning [illegible] and asked to fly as ball turret gunner for another crew in our squadron as their gunner had been grounded. I didn't want to fly for I was [illegible] on a [illegible] mission [illegible] [illegible] but I figured I'd [illegible] my [illegible] [illegible]. I didn't know the fellows that I was to fly with [illegible] [illegible] feeling [illegible] [illegible]. When [illegible] [illegible] we all went into the briefing room to be briefed on the target. When the briefing [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible] was [illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] and [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

There was a crash and our ship gave a lurch which was a sign that we had been hit. Unfortunately, our no 1 engine had been hit and the pilot couldn't feather the prop because the prop governer had been knocked off. We kept in formation for a short while then we started falling back.

We were still in formation when we got over the Baltic sea but falling back fast. All of a sudden the nose gunner called "enemy fighters coming in at 12 o'clock" and then he started firing.

I was sitting in the ball waiting for them to go under us when all of a sudden I saw NO 3 engine of Bomb Totin Mama get blown to hell [illegible] left

Then the enemy fighters went zooming by I fired but they were out of sight before I could pull the trigger again.

I called the pilot and told him to keep away from Bomb Totin Mama because she was burning and might blow up. Then the waist gunner cried that they were coming in at 3 o'clock but I couldn't see them as they were to high for me to see. Then the ship gave a lurch and went up on its side and started down in a dive. I was still praying when the pilot leveled off. A 20 MM had hit our stabilyzer and blown a hole in it big enough to crawl thru so help me God.

Evidently the fighters had used up their ammunition so they did'nt hit us again. By that time we had

reached German territory and we had lost altitude and we were down to 15000 ft. The pilot told us that we would never reach England but it was possible to reach Holland and crash land on the coast. But luck was against us the formation was out of sight and we were struggling along all alone, when we ran into more flak. It was impossible to avoid it as our ship was crippled so bad and we had to ride right thru it. By the way Dear Reader I haven't mentioned anything about the crew as yet so I am happy to say at the present that no-one had been injured thus far. Well [illegible] turret praying to God to help me when all of a sudden I got hit. The turret had been pointing down and flak had hit my turret square in the center of my saftey glass. I felt the shattered glass hit me in the face and the sound shocked me. Immediately I called the pilot and told him I had been hit. The Bombardier who was at the waist gun turned my turret around and opened the door. By that time I had come to my sences and examined myself finding that I had only a few scratches on my face so I called the pilot and told him I was okay. My turret was completely out so I put my chute on and went to the hight waist gun while the Bombardier went up front.

Every thing was going along fine we were down to 10000 ft and limping

(cont)

along pretty smoothly. The Navigator told us that we would be over Holland in 30 min and we were pretty happy because there is a better chance of escaping in Holland than in Germany. Pretty soon the nose gunner called up and said there was four fighters at 1 o'clock but we couldnt tell wether they were enemy or friends.

The Pilot gave the radio operator orders to shoot some green flares to bring friendly fighters to our aid if there was any around. Then the tail gunner cried FW 190 s coming in on our tail then he started firing I pointed my gun to the rear and started firing also. The first fighter blew up and the three [illegible] away. They sat out at 5 o'clock for a few minutes then they started around for the tail again.

Pretty soon the tail gunner started hollering "here they come here they come" then his guns opened up. The enemy fighters started firing and the 30 s were coming in all about us then the 20 MMs started popping around the waist. A 20 hit the tail turret square in the center and the tail gunner just fell out backward into the cat walk. I couldnt see the fighters this time but the left waist gunner was firing away. I turned to help the tail gunner thinking he was injured when the second ship opened up I was standing in the center of the waist facing the rear while bullets were miraculously bouncing all around me.

By this time the ship was a mass of flame. I was hit in the chest by a bursting 20 which knocked me to the floor. I was saved for the moment by my flak suit, which was burning like blazes so I beat it out with my hands. I was on my knees praying and waiting for the one that would end me but it never came thank God.

The upper turret gunner had been killed and the pilot was wounded badly and the ship was a mass of flames so the Co-Pilot gave orders to bail-out.

By this time the tail gunner was on his feet and I thank the Lord that he wasn't injured very badly. He grabbed [illegible] did so and he pulled the rip cord and sent his silk flying all over the escape hatch. Thinking he was a doomed man he stood on the cat-walk in a daze.

I was frightened out of my wits but I gathered up his silk and piled it in his arms then I opened the escape hatch and told him to jump.

He stood there looking straight ahead thinking (As he told me later) that he would never get down alive. I knew that he would die in the crash if he stayed with the ship. All of a sudden the dirty Heinies started firing at us again so I pushed the tail gunner out. I was hit about the legs and arms with shrapnel before I jumped. I also heard the waist gunner holler

that he was hit. I was happy to see his chute open above me and the tail gunner floating down under me.

I saw our plane leaving us and then I saw five men jump and their chutes open. The plane with the Pilot and upper turret gunner came around below us burning like hell then it went into a dive. Before it hit the ground the ship twisted in two by the waist windows and hit the ground in two sections. Then every thing was quiet it was as if I was in Heaven the only thing I felt was a burning sensation in my groin where the parachute straps had tightened when I pulled the rip cord. then out of the clouds came two FW 190s one of them came straight at me I almost passed out thinking of the bullets that would soon be passing through me, when the prettiest sight I ever seen came wizzing out of the clouds it was three P-47's and one came between me and the F.W. and you should have seen that Heinie run he turned and got away from me as fast as possible.

All I could see or hear for a few minutes was a nice little dog-fight then every thing was quiet. I was now about 5000 ft high and just floating around like a bubble. Below me was a very small village and about 300 yds away was a clump of trees. I saw the tail gunner land right in the center of the plowed up field and land flat

on his face. I tried to steer my chute for the trees but I landed on the edge of the field. When I hit I let myself relax and my head went down between my knees and buried my nose in the soft dirt. When I slipped out of my harness the tail gunner was almost to the spot where I landed. He was very excited and nervous and bleeding about the hands and arms. He said "Duffy what shall we do," where do you think we are, shall we give up, and many other questions. He was a hell of a nice kid 19 yrs old and he had beautiful curly hair and he was very nice looking. There was a bunch of women from the village coming out to meet us but [illegible] when they were about 50 ft from us. They waved for us to come to them and they kept calling us comrades. Well Russ and I thinking we were in Holland went to them. They kept saying "Americano" so we nodded that we were. Pretty soon two old men came up to us both with double barrelled shot guns. I asked them if we were in holland and they answered (deutch) so we thought we were in Holland. They had German Swastika arm bands on so that started us to thinking

One of them rammed a shotgun in Russ's back and because of the condition he was in he passed out. Immediately a couple of the women searched him for a gun and one of the men also searched me. When Russ came too they marched us

to a large house in the center of
the village we were there about 15 min
when a couple of Germans came
marching in with the Co-Pilot, Navigator
nose gunner waist gunner and Bombardier
The Bombardier had burned all the
way down his hair was burned off and
the skin on his face was hanging in
shreds. He was completly out of his
head, Parky the waist gunner had been
hit in the right knee, Russ was cut
about the hands and arms I had cuts
about my arms legs and face. The Pilot
was dead and the engineer or top Turret
gunner was also dead, the radio operator
was missing. you can just imagine what
we looked like standing there in the center
of the village all battered to hell. I was
thankful that it was a nice day because
we had a long walk to make that day.
The Bombardier was put into a car and
taken to a hospital, the rest of us were
made to walk 5 miles to a larger town
were we met the Radio Operator who was seated
in the rear of a car with a German guard on
each side of him. We had started to
walk from the village about 12:30 and we
reached the town about 4:00. We were then
taken to a large building which looked like
a dormitory, and put into cells. The cells
were very small about 6 ft wide and 10 ft long
Each cell had two flat boards which we
had to sleep on. There was one small window
which was barred and a small peep hole in
the solid steel door so the guard could

check on us every so often. We were in our cells about half an hour when we were all taken out in the yard which had a 15 ft cement wall all around it. We were forced to strip and our clothes were thoroughly searched.

Our escape kits first aid kits and our excess clothes were piled in a corner of the hall. By this time we were pretty damn hungry so we tried to get them to bring us some food. We were successful because the guard brought us some black bread with something that tasted like lard spread on it. It was really horrible stuff and it was impossible to eat it. He also brought us some [illegible] coffee [illegible] tasted like vinegar. When the guard was getting some food for the other fellows he left our door open and we could see our equipment in the corner. The Co-Pilot, nose gunner + myself were in the cell and we decided to steal some of our stuff so when the guard went into one of the cells I stole one escape kit, a pack of gum which I had in my cover-alls and the co pilot got his wallet which he had brought with him by mistake. When the guard locked our cells I stuck a piece of paper over the peep hole with a piece of gum and we opened the Co Pilots wallet. He had a lot of important papers which we had to get rid of so we ate them. We then opened the escape kit and ate the

chocolate ate some vitamin pills and I disposed of the tube of condensed milk.

Then we opened the map of Germany to find out where we were. The name of that certain town was not on the map but we were not far from the Holland boarder which was about 20 miles away.

The map was made of rice paper so we disposed of it and then went to sleep on our wooden bunks. We were pretty tired and slept till noon the next day.

We were fed two more slices of black bread which (being as hungry as we were) we gladly ate. Then we met our first German officer. He had us taken in the courtyard and he started asking us questions. He could speak pretty good English and Ill repeat our conversation.

He asked a couple of us our ages so we told him. He then asked us a few military questions which none of us would answer. Then the Co Pilot asked him what they were going to do with us so he laughed and said — "You will be shot. You bomb our women and children so you will all be shot!" Then he laughed.

Well Dear Reader you cand imagine how we felt. I noticed every one of my crew turn deathly white and I could feel my stomach turn. The Co Pilot recovered soon enough to smile at him and say "thats nice".

Then the officer told us we were to be taken away shortly and sure

enough it wasn't long before we were
piled into a truck with three guards.
All of our equipment was in the
truck and the Bombardier was lying
on a parachute. He was bandaged from
head to toe but still wore his burned
clothes. There was also two plain wooden
caskets with the bodies of our crew member
sitting in the rear of the truck.
We were riding quite some time
when we started crossing a field this
started us to thinking that this was it.
But we were only visiting the
spot where the German fighter Pilot
crashed. His casket was also loaded in
the rear of the truck and we were
on our way again. It was late in
the afternoon when we pulled up to
a morgue in Lingen where four of
us carried the caskets. The bombardier
was then taken to a hospital close
by and that was the last we saw
of him. The rest of us were taken
to an air field outside of town where
we had a bowl of soup for supper
and then taken to a room which
had six double wooden beds which
we were to sleep on that night.
Later on a P-47 pilot was brought
into our room but he would not
speak to us until he was convinced
that there was no spies among us.
After answering most of our questions
he went to sleep and it wasn't long
before we were all sleeping also.

We were awakened about 10:00 a.m and given some liverwurst & bread to eat. I was then taken to another building where an english speaking German asked me a few questions to which I gave him my name rank & serial number. I was told to strip and then they went thru my clothes with a fine tooth comb. They found my small compass which was hidden in the seam of my heated flying jacket. I was then taken to the guard shack at the entrance to the field to wait for the other fellows. When we were all together again we were marched into the woods opposite the field. Behind us came six Jerries with machine guns and boy did we sweat.

We were told to lie down on the ground and we were very happy to see the six Jerries march past us. Every one of us had thought that we were going to be shot, but as we found out later we were taken in the woods because there was an air raid on. The six Jerries were going to their posts to watch for crippled bombers that were comming back low. After the air raid we were piled into a truck and taken to the railroad station. We were put in a special coach and we rode till late in the afternoon.

Our destination was a Luftwaffe base at Dumber Lake were we were to spend the night. Captain _____ (the P-47 pilot) and myself were put in the cell over-looking the field. He and I got pretty friendly & was planning escape in an enemy ship should we get the chance

There was only one bed in the cell with some straw to lie on. The Capt. wanted me to take the bed but considering his rank I let him have it and I spent a very cold nite on the floor. We were awakened in the morning by a loud whizzing sound and rushing to the high barred window we noticed an odd looking ship just clearing the field. The Capt told me that it was probably the Germans new "jet propelled rocket plane," which was at that time pretty secret. He wanted to get some information on it so we spent most of our time looking for it to come back but we never did see it again.

At noon we were then given a bowl of soup which (being as hungry as we were) tasted pretty damn good.

In midafternoon about 12 more american flyers were brought into the jail. There was three fighter pilots & a bomber crew minus one man who was hit by a 20 MM and was not found yet. (He is now at our camp sporting many scars.) There was one P-51 pilot a very short guy about 5 ft 3 in. he was really going mad. While we were getting supper he stole a key from the key ring which the guard had left in the door.

When the guard left he unlocked his cell & then he unlocked all of ours. He then went out in the yard climbed up on the wall but was seen by a guard & soon we were all in our cells again

APR

Early the next morning we were piled into a large bus and taken to the station. We had about 25 guards for about 20 of us. Again we were piled into a special coach and started on our way to parts unknown. Several times we had to switch trains and we had the opportunity of seeing the damage our bombing had done.

Everyone of the cities we stopped at was bombed almost flat. The civilian population spit and swore at us whenever we encountered them. They kept calling us "Baby Killers", "Luft Gangsters" and several other names. During the afternoon we tried as best we could to find out where we were going. The Jerry in charge could speak English and he told us we were going to Frankfurt to a camp called "Dulag Luft". While we were talking to him the small P-51 Pilot climbed out one of the windows and was crawling along the platform on the side of the coach. The train started to slow down and just when he got to the rear of the coach a guard stuck a machine gun out the window and told him to halt.

Seeing a gun pointing at him he immediately jumped in the closest window and took a seat. He had a special guard the rest of the trip. Now a few lines to let you know what we had to eat on this trip. The guard in charge had a suitcase with liverwurst and bread in it.

At dinner we got a slice of bread and a small piece of meat. For supper we got the same thing. Most of us went to sleep after supper and boy it was miserable

APRIL-14.

We awoke about 9:00 had no breakfast so we just watched the scenery until noon when we got another slice of bread and a piece of meat. We spent the afternoon in the same manner watching the scenery and also a chance to escape. We pulled into Frankfurt about 3:30 in the afternoon taken off the train and piled into a Trolley car which took us about 2 miles where we were taken off and lined up in the road. We were then marched about a mile to the camp. Now this camp is Germany's main interrogation camp for American and English prisoners. We were all put in Dungeons about four men to a cell. The cells were in the basement they had one small window level with the [illegible]. The guard brought a [illegible] bucket of soup for us to eat it was a thin green soup and wasn't fit for a dog to eat, but to a bunch of men as hungry as we were it really tasted swell. We only were allowed one bowl per man. After three hrs of the dungeon I was taken upstairs and put into a small room with a German Interrogator. He gave me a sheet of paper and told me to fill it out but I refused so he got pretty mad. He asked me such questions as follows, how old are you, what position did you fly, what is the name of your crew members, how many were killed, what is their names, who was the wireless oper, what kind of ship did you fly, what is the number, what group were you in, how were you shot down, etc. To these questions I said nothing so he got very mad. He said how do we know you are not a spy.

APRIL - 14

I told him my army dog tags proved that I was no spy. He said that the dog tags meant nothing because I may have found them. So he accused me of being a spy and said that I would be shot. But he said if you will prove you are no spy by telling us the number of your ship and your group number everything will be all right. Well I was at the point where I didn't give a damn what happened to me so I said okay then I'm a spy. That kinda changed his tone a little, he laughed and said now Sgt I know you are not a spy I also know what kind of ship you flew and what base you are from. Now just tell me your ship number and letter so that I can let you go back to your cell. I said if you know all about me there is no need for me to tell you any more. He blew his top and called a guard to take me away. I was taken to a cell on the same floor, it was larger than the one in the basement but there was 8 prisoners in it. We had to sleep on the floor and it was a horrible night.

APRIL - 15

I awoke about 8:30 in the morning and had a drink of Jerry tea for breakfast. Jerry tea looks like muddy water and tastes similar. About 9:30 I was taken to another room and stripped, my clothes were searched but they didn't find my compass. The only clothes I got back was my underwear, coveralls and heated jacket inserts and my felt shoes. I was then taken out into the yard with the other prisoners that were already there. There was three barracks in the yard,

APRIL-15

two for enlisted men and one for officers.
Now this small camp was supplied with American Red Cross parcels so we had some fairly good meals while we were there. We had to sleep on the floor on German Paliasia which is just a straw sack filled or should I say half filled with straw. Well we had a pretty good nights sleep and woke to a very nice morning.

APRIL 16

Now this day is one that will live long in my memory. It was a beautiful Sunday. 200 Sgts were to leave at 4:00 in the afternoon for a permanent camp. We were all lined up outside the barbed wire listening to a German talk.
He said quote, Now Gentlemen you are American Sgts. our prisoners, I warn you to do as I say and do not try to escape, we are German soldiers and will shoot to kill believe me Gentlemen and do not try to escape. While he was giving us a speech our Officers had all lined up in columns of fours facing us.
When the Germans started marching us away they saluted us and sang "Should Auld Acquaintance Be Forgot" it was a very sad moment and the tears were streaming down my face and I could see many of the other boys crying also. We were marched to the station and piled in box cars 40 men in a car. We were packed in like cattle. We had nothing to eat but a piece of meat and bread for each meal. It was the most miserable ride I ever had we traveled three days and three nights in this manner and we really looked and felt like a bunch of bums.

APRIL 19

The train pulled into Krems Austria on the Danube at about 2:00 P.M. we were marched from the train to the camp which was five miles from the station.

The camp is situated in the Carpathian Mts. Krems Austria lies in a valley five miles from camp.

From here on I will tell of my life in Stalag 17 B. in KREMS AUSTRIA ON THE DANUBE 40 miles from VIENNA The capital of Austria.

We arrived at camp about 5:30 the Germans made us strip and threw our clothes into a corner. We were given wooden clogs to wear and nothing else. We stood in line naked waiting to have our pictures taken (dont get me wrong I mean of our faces) We looked like a bunch of wild men I needed a haircut and I had a 10 days growth of beard (oh yes I had a beard) and everyone of us needed a shower. well after having our photos taken we were marched to another building naked. In this building we had our hair all cut off by some of our boys and we were given a good hot shower which felt so so divine. Each of us was given a pair of O.D pants and a shirt no shoes. Then we were marched through the Russian Compound to the American Compound where we were greeted by the camp band. They took us to an empty barrack and gave us some soup and sandwiches to eat while the band played for us. Almost the whole camp was piled into the barrack trying to find someone they knew I met a couple of fellows that I went to gunnery school with. We were given one Jerry blanket each and one Paliasse for two men. DeForest and I slept together on one blanket and one over us. We spent a hell of a cold night